

BIKE TEST



Budget tourers

Touring bikes tend to cost four figures these days. **Chris Juden** reviews two that cost just £500: a Raleigh Royal and a Revolution Country Traveller

» **WHEN JOE PUBLIC ASKS** for a quick bike for work, some shopping on the way home, weekends away and the occasional cycling tour, the shop assistant will show him almost every other kind of bike except a drop handlebar tourer! You need to be a bit of an expert already to know about touring bikes. And if you're that much into cycling, you'll probably be spending more than £500.

Almost nobody makes tourers that cheap, so when Joe Public asks... they won't have any in stock! However, there are a couple which sell for a penny under five hundred quid – or even less with internet discounts and year-end reductions.

So what kind of tourer do you get

The Country Traveller's aluminium frame keeps the total weight reasonable. In fact, it's lighter than the £175 dearer Revolution Country Explorer

for a monkey? Because component manufacturers don't really cater for classic touring bikes (flat bar road, yes; drop bar with mountain kit, no), this isn't an easy thing to get right at any price. Edinburgh Bicycle Coop do pretty well with their Revolution. Raleigh, however, fall into several traps.

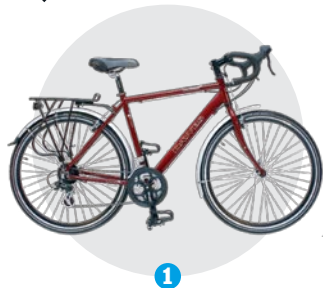
Frame & fork

If you can feel the difference between the Revolution's alloy and the Raleigh's steel, you're a better man than I – or perhaps a true princess! They're both very solid, both have steel forks anyway, but an alloy frame at least saves some weight from the Revolution. Both come with a comprehensive set of fittings for

everything you need to attach when touring.

The Raleigh's gear hanger had been bent in transit, but the thin steel was just as easy to bend straight again. The Revolution's alloy hanger is harder to bend and so is replaceable if it snaps instead.

Geometries are typical touring and similar except in one major respect: the Revolution is 2.5 cm (an inch) longer than the Raleigh and most other mid-sized touring frames, making up for this with a stem 3cm shorter. The reach ends up the same, so from the saddle you won't know any difference. And big-footed riders may appreciate the very generous toe clearance, but if you want the bars



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Also consider

1) Dawes Vantage £599.99

Similar weight (14kg), aluminium frame and spec to the Revolution, with perfectly indexed gearing, brake adjusters, good wheels and tyres. dawescycles.com

2) Ridgeback Dual Track Advance £499.99

Flat-bar trekking bikes aren't so common in the UK, but a hybrid with fittings for a rack and mudguards like this one will serve. It'll accept touring tyres too. ridgeback.co.uk

closer than suits Mr Average (as most women do) you'll struggle to find a stem that's any shorter.

I think both bikes would handle better with less trail and a bit more fork offset, but the Revolution steers fine and the Raleigh's greatest problem seems to be a bad headset. The Revolution also has a lower bottom-bracket, which is good when you stop: something you do a lot of when touring or commuting.

Wheels

Tyres make a huge difference to the feel, comfort, efficiency and even the handling of a bike. Although these are budget bikes, they both fit a good brand of tyre, but from the bottom of each brand's range. Riding them nevertheless reminded me why I always choose something better.

The Revolution's smooth and narrow Continental tyres are actually closer to 28 than the 32mm they claim to be, but belied their sporty looks and label. The Raleigh's basic Marathons, on the other hand, were even bigger than their claimed 35 or 37mm (take your pick of the writing on the sidewall!) and were even less rewarding to pedal. Their drag combined with 68mm of trail and a sticky headset to make the

The Raleigh Royal ticks all the touring boxes – pannier rack, mudguards, trekking gearing, cantilever brakes, drops – but is a less satisfactory package

handling really unpleasant.

To their credit, Raleigh's wheels have four more spokes, so all else being equal they'll be less prone to breakages, whilst the Revolution has slightly better hubs.

Brakes

Since cable adjusters come on a road bike brake calliper and a mountain bike lever, they must be added to the tourer that uses neither. The Revolution has a pair of extra levers that you can use from the tops, which come with adjusters. These will save a lot of loosening and clamping of cables, that'll cause frayed strands (and nerves) for Raleigh owners!

Neither bike has any brake quick-release, so the cables must be kept loose enough to unhook the straddle. That reduces the margin of error before they're too loose to stop the bike properly, so adjustments will be frequent.

The Revolution's wide-profile cantilevers require stronger hands but are easier to keep adjusted than Raleigh's Tektro Oryx, which have faulty straddles. The tube is shorter than the wire, and it's only resting upon the mudguard that keeps the main cable from pulling off-centre! The

Royal's brakes nevertheless work very well – for now.

Transmission

The range of gears is typical of ready-made tourers at any price point: ridiculously high top and a bottom that might usefully be lower. A big tyre makes the Raleigh's gears slightly higher. Otherwise they're identical, not only in ratios but shifters and mechs.

The chainsets differ only slightly and this time Raleigh gets the best of it with bolt-on interchangeable rings rather than riveted. Both chainsets, however, are significantly further from the frame than a road triple sits. The Revolution's shifting is not too bad but the Raleigh's chainset is so far out that the middle of the cassette aligns with its inner ring! The big sprocket runs a bit rough in middle ring on both bikes, but the Raleigh is worse and its front mech rubs the chain too. It can't be adjusted to avoid this without compromising the shift, and trimming is not available on these basic STI levers.

These sorts of niggles, which admittedly one can live with, are only to be expected when the budget does not stretch to a specialist touring chainset: one that mounts smaller rings on a road-bike chainline.

Steering, seating & the rest

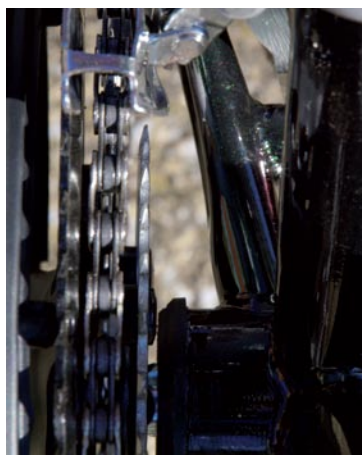
I didn't care much for the shape of the Raleigh's handlebars, or where they'd put the levers, or the headset quality. It felt fine until I got on the bike, at which it seemed to stiffen up under load, feeling only slightly less sticky when I tried a better tyre. (Investigations were thwarted by a stuck upper bearing that I was reluctant to attack with force!) I had no such trouble in directing the Revolution – dig that red star logo!

Raleigh almost redeem themselves in the seating area, by fitting a much nicer saddle – with a hole. I don't often like holey saddles but this one felt good, much better to sit on all day than the Revolution's lumpy pads. Saddles, however, are a personal thing.

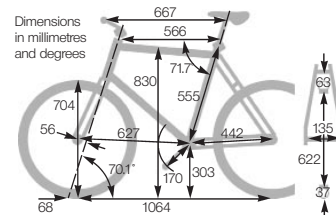
These bikes both come with similar pedals, plastic toe-clips and straps, identical mudguards – complete with front safety release – and tubular alloy rear carriers, to which Raleigh add the bonus of a luggage strap.

Conclusion

It's rather obvious that the Revolution is a better bike. For a start it's lighter – a

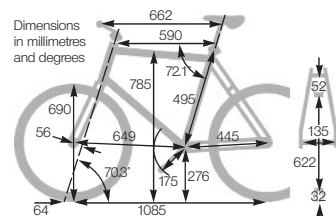


(Top to bottom) The Revolution's extra brake levers come with barrel adjusters. The Raleigh has plenty of space for the closer chainline it needs. The Raleigh's asymmetric brake straddle is stabilised by the front mudguard



Raleigh Royal

- Price:** £499.99
- Weight:** 15.5kg
- Size:** 55cm
- Size range:** 50, 55, 60cm
- Frame and fork:** Plain 4130 steel frame and fork, with fittings for carriers (simple low-load) and 3 bottles
- Wheels:** Schwalbe Marathon 37-622 tyres; alloy rims; 36x3 14g stainless spokes; alloy q/r hubs
- Gearing:** 24-speed, 24-121 inches. Truvativ 48/38/28
- crankset;** Shimano 11-32 cassette; 2303 front mech & STI shifters; Acera rear
- Braking:** Tektro Oryx cantilever
- Steering & seating:** 44cm alloy drop bar; 10cmx15" stem; threadless headset. RSP saddle (with hole); alloy post
- Equipment:** Mudguards; tubular alloy rear carrier with strap
- Contact:** Raleigh Cycles Ltd – raleigh.co.uk, 01773 532 600



Revolution Country Traveller

- Price:** £499.99
- Weight:** 13.8kg
- Size:** 49cm
- Size range:** 46, 49, 52cm
- Frame and fork:** Plain 7005 alloy frame; steel fork; fittings for carriers (duplex low-load) and 3 bottles
- Wheels:** Continental Sport Contact 32-622 tyres; alloy rims; 32x3 14g black spokes; Shimano q/r hubs
- Gearing:** 24-speed, 24-119 inches. Truvativ 48/38/28 crankset. Shimano
- 11-32 cassette;** 2303 front mech & STI shifters; Acera rear
- Braking:** Tektro CR520 cantilever
- Steering & seating:** 44cm alloy drop bar; 7cmx10" stem; threadless headset. Velo saddle; alloy post
- Equipment:** Mudguards; tubular alloy rear carrier
- Contact:** Edinburgh Bicycle Cooperative – edinburghbicycle.com, 0845 257 0808